



NEWS RELEASE



United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Washington Conservation Commission

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Conservation Program Adds Flexibility to Attract Participation

Washington CREP Improving Salmon Habitat

(SPOKANE, WA, April 14, 2010) – Private landowners have more flexibility to enhance salmon habitat as a result of recent improvements to a popular conservation program according to Judy Olson, State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency. County conservation districts and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency will be taking applications for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which now offers additional conservation practices and provides for additional lands to be eligible. Signup for this enhanced CREP program begins April 14, 2010 and is on a continuous basis.

“Landowners have requested these changes to the program,” said Olson. “And in December, FSA signed an agreement with our partner, the Washington Conservation Commission, after extensive negotiations.”

CREP is a national voluntary program that in Washington improves habitat and water quality in salmon streams. Land enrolled in 10-15 year CREP contracts is removed from agricultural production and grazing. In return, producers receive annual rental payments, contract signing incentives and financial incentives of nearly 100 percent reimbursement for creating new wildlife habitat. Approved conservation practices can include livestock fencing and water quality improvements.

In addition to traditional riparian buffers, participants can now use 15-foot hedgerow buffers along smaller water courses, upstream grass filter strips, and wetland enhancements connected to salmon streams. In addition, orchards, vineyards and berry farms are now eligible for all CREP practices.

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“We are pleased to be able to offer landowners more flexibility. The end result will be increased quantity and better quality habitat for threatened and endangered salmon and other steelhead species,” added Olson. “Landowners can meet critical habitat needs without sacrificing large portions of their farms or ranches.”

"This is an exciting addition to the Washington CREP because we can improve water quality conditions in a greater suite of streams. It's a win-win for all involved," said Mark Clark, Executive Director of the Washington State Conservation Commission.

All CREP practices must be established according to USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) technical standards and specifications. NRCS and local conservation districts provide technical assistance on the design and installation of the practices.

Cropland eligible for CREP must have a cropping history of at least four years between 1996 and 2001. Land, except wetlands, must be adjacent to eligible streams. In Washington, there are 10,000 miles of designated streams where riparian habitat is a significant limiting factor for salmon and steelhead species.

Landowners may sign up for CREP with their local conservation district or Farm Service Agency at any time. For more information about CREP, visit your local U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/wa.

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